

UP FROM SHI'ISM

An Analytical Study of the Shia and Sunni Doctrines

- This is the story of one man's quest for the truth.
- Accompany the author as he searches for answers and eventually studies the two major sects of Islam: Shia and Sunni.
- Discover relevant and fascinating information about Islam, the Prophet Muhammad (upon whom be peace), the Qur'an, and the origins of the Shia and Sunni sects.
- The information presented on this Web site is based on the book *Up from Shi'ism* by Farhad Amirebrahimi (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Publishing, 1984). This site provides greater depth and research to give readers additional facts and information.

"Farhad Amirebrahimi, who comes from Iran and was once Shia himself, rises above his heritage. His vantage is unique and so is his courage. With dogged determination, the hallmark of an inquisitive mind, he probes his inherited faith, questions its basic assumptions, and for answers goes to the Qur'an—the ultimate criterion . . . concise and clear and grounded in stunning rationale. Farhad sifts the grain from the chaff."

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Why the Need for Such a Book?

I have been asked many times what has motivated me to take an analytical look at the positions taken by the Sunnis and the Shias with respect to the teachings of Islam. I believe a brief account of my life would explain why I took up this task. I hope that this humble work, with the help of Allah, will be useful to those who care for the truth.

I was born in a middle-class modern Iranian family during the Shah's regime. The second of four brothers, I grew up in an environment of conflicting values; an environment in which many Muslim youth are still living and suffering.

We were told by the advancement of science in the twentieth century that there was no longer a need to follow the commandments of Allah and to obey His blessed Prophet, upon whom be peace. We were taught not to believe in ideas such as God-consciousness, sin, the virgin birth of Jesus, life after death, the Day of Judgment, Hell fire, and Paradise.

At the same time, we were not to discard them totally. The result was a life based on a compromise between the divinely ordained way of life and a manmade, materialistic, modern way of life. This compromise brought about great distress and confusion to even the "educated and enlightened" class. As for children, this confusion grew worse as they grew up and faced many problems related to their individual and social life. For example, we were told it was acceptable to have a girlfriend or a boyfriend (a modern concept) but not acceptable to have sexual relations outside marriage (an Islamic concept).

Living in a Muslim country, part of our education curriculum was three hours of religious studies per week. We were taught about the lives of the Prophets, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (upon them all be peace), and the twelve Shia Imams, who are considered Prophet Muhammad's successors. We were taught what great men they were: men of truth, wisdom, patience, and sacrifice. Men who spent their entire lives in pleasing Allah and serving humanity. But three hours of religious study a week were not enough to keep me on the straight path.

As a young man fascinated with American movies and technology, I prayed long and hard to come to America, the land where dreams came true! Finally, after overcoming many obstacles, I joined my older brother, who was studying in California, in September 1977.

I was only sixteen years old. At first everything seemed new and interesting. Here I was finally in the land of freedom, equality, and justice. However, what I learned in my U.S. history class changed my perception of America completely. My high school history teacher, teaching from a state-approved textbook, shattered my ideas about freedom, equality, and justice in America. He told us all about the elite white Christian ruling class and the disenfranchised minorities. Despite some improvements in the past few decades, thanks to the civil rights movement, the power and wealth of the country remained in the hands of a few.

I also noticed a clear lack of knowledge and understanding of the rest of the world and other cultures among my peers and the public in general. Over time I realized that many of the things I had learned in Iran about America from the movies, magazines, and people who had vacationed there were not entirely accurate. Moreover, I realized that living in California, having a blonde girlfriend, getting my driver's license, and going to parties did not bring true happiness and contentment.

I felt lonely and purposeless. At one point it even seemed logical to end my life and see if there was a better life after this. I was in a bind. After many months of pondering and soul searching, I finally decided that with the limited time I have on this earth I should make a positive difference in people's lives. So I planned to become a doctor, join the United Nations, and serve humanity. This goal gave my life a meaningful purpose and directed all my actions.

Now that I had decided to live, I planned to take courses and trainings that would help me accomplish my goals. One class that really helped me was psychology. What I learned in psychology made me realize that I had the choice to choose empowering beliefs as well as disempowering ones. Thus I decided to adopt—among the many empowering beliefs that helped me become mentally and physically stronger and more confident—the empowering belief that there was an absolute Supreme Being. I chose to believe that a Supreme Being had created me and had a clear plan for my life and that everything good or bad happened in my life for a reason. This was definitely an empowering and health-enhancing belief for my mind and body, instead of the disempowering one that my life was the result of a series of accidents.

Also, I thought it would be a wise decision to continually improve myself, exercise, eat right, and strive to get the best out of life. However, to get the best that life has to offer, I decided never to transgress the bounds of morality and goodness.

The more I studied ways to improve myself, the more I realized how my life was really based on mere guesswork. The great differences among the “experts” in every field led me to a simple fact of life: If this world has come about by the will of an All-Knowing, All-Wise Creator, there has to be a way of knowing His guidance on various matters. Obviously, He would have complete knowledge of everything. I sincerely wished that there was a way that I could tap into God's knowledge. It was exactly at this stage that I entered the University of California at Davis.

There I met a number of very nice, very devout, fundamentalist Christians. One of them was my roommate. They were the first truly religious young people I had met. They did not drink or smoke and had healthful living habits. I did not really care for their warnings about sin, Hell, and so on, for I considered those ideas outdated. At the time I had a strong sense of purpose for my life, was very self-confident, and did not feel I needed a religion to be happy or fulfilled. However, I was looking for a way to tap into God's knowledge, and studying religions seemed like a logical way to start.

Thus my search into religions was out of an inspiration to learn and grow, not out of desperation of trying to grab hold of something to get me through life. I had met people who, out of the need for spiritual fulfillment, would accept and rationalize practically any religion or way of life. As I had learned in psychology, it provided them with some peace of mind and/or gave them a sense of community, all to fulfill a psychological need. Although those were wonderful benefits, one may attain those by practicing yoga and meditation and joining a support group or a club, without following a religion. ([A simple and logical approach](#))

I started my search with Christianity and Islam and eventually studied all major world religions and some of the minor ones as well. Being a skeptical and scientific-minded person, I was not willing to accept any idea or concept simply based on faith or a good feeling in my heart. I always believed in keeping an open mind and reasoned that if you couldn't prove it to me here and now, how can I supposedly meet God (or face myself in the mirror) and justify why I followed a particular religion or way of life.

I began to read the Bible and ask questions of my Christian friends and their ministers. Coming from a Muslim background, where one believes in one God and prays directly to Him and only asks God for help and forgiveness, it was very difficult for me to pray to Jesus. I noticed in the Bible that Abraham, Noah, Moses, and all the other people never prayed to Jesus, so why should I? My Christian friends could not provide a convincing answer. I also did not find any passage in the Bible where Jesus asked people to pray to him. I had prayed to God directly and received answers to my prayers in the past.

It was also difficult for me to believe in the trinity or in the doctrine of original sin. Again, I did not find any passage in the Bible where Jesus (peace be upon him) taught these. The few visits I made to various churches, from Baptist to Mormon, and the discussions I had with their ministers and elders, brought me no closer to Christianity.

I continued to read the Bible and began to read the Qur'an and compare both texts. I found reading the Qur'an to be an intensely intellectual as well as intensely spiritual experience. It constantly challenged me to think, judge, evaluate, and use my mind while presenting beautiful inspiring examples, stories, and arguments, such as:

Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for people of understanding. Those who remember God standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying]: “Our Lord! You have not created [all] this without purpose, glory be to You!”
(Qur’an, 3:190–191)

And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them, and He has put between you love and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect. And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors. Indeed, in that are indeed signs for those of sound knowledge.
(Qur’an, 30:21–22)

Besides asking the reader to think and ponder, amazingly enough, the Qur’an even asks the reader to prove that it is not a revelation from God. ([Read more passages from the Qur’an.](#))

Of course, I also read several books about Prophet Muhammad, written by both Muslims and non-Muslims. I was looking at his life from the human achievement perspective. I saw an ordinary illiterate man known for kindness and honesty who saw Angel Gabriel at the age of forty while meditating in a cave and was transformed into a leader, judge, general, statesman, legislator, team builder, reformer, and much more. At home, he lived an austere life and helped by cleaning, cooking, and mending his own clothes.

The transformation that occurred in the men and women who were his followers, which numbered half a million by the time of his death, was quite amazing. A nation of warring tribes, drunks, criminals, adulterers, and dysfunctional families, some of whom buried their baby girls alive out of shame, was transformed into a united, sober nation, free of crime and injustice. ([Learn more about the life of Prophet Muhammad.](#))

I also studied the scriptures of Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism and took a comparative religious studies course. I discovered that among the world’s major religions only the life of Islam’s Prophet and its book have been meticulously preserved. In fact, from the way Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) brushed his teeth to the text of his letter inviting Heracleus, the emperor of Rome, to Islam has been preserved. Whatever was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was written down, memorized, and remained as revealed words. No editing, no proofreading, no changes. Unfortunately, the books of all other major faiths have been tampered with and the lives of the ones they claim received God’s message are shrouded in mystery.

Islam provides the clearest and most comprehensive explanation of Abrahamic monotheism. It teaches that there is one universal Creator and Sustainer, without a partner or a chosen people, and there is no other god. It teaches that there is no lasting love, true security, real honor, lasting happiness, or real peace and contentment except through God. There is no absolute obedience except to God. It combines this with reason,

logic, and science to satisfy one's mind and spirit. There is One Creator. He is the only one worthy of worship without any intermediaries (persons, objects, clergy, etc.) between Him and us: a direct one-to-one relationship.

This really appealed to me because I could not see humbling myself to anyone but my Creator. Islam teaches that God, whose name is Al-Lah, has no gender, partners, or associates and does not have a chosen people based on race, tribe, nationality, or blood relations. He has put us all here for a few years as a test until we return to Him for judgment. He is the Most Merciful and the Just.

Islam also teaches that God's creation does not share His exclusive attributes. He alone knows the future, forgives sins, and answers prayers. So there is no room for astrologers and palm readers who claim to know the future, priests to forgive sins, and saints to answer our prayers. Also God does not suffer limitations of His creation. Anyone or anything that sleeps, eats, gets sick, or has an end cannot be God. This puts an end to taking people and other creations as gods. Since God has complete power over all things (the Qur'an tells us that not even a leaf drops without His permission) and everything happens based on His wise plan, there is no room for superstitions, such as believing that a rabbit's foot brings good luck or Friday the 13th brings bad luck. Everything happens based on God's will and wise plan. ([Learn more about Islamic monotheism.](#))

Despite all this, I was not ready to commit to Islam. One night, on the suggestion of some Mormon friends, I knelt before the Almighty and sincerely asked Him to save me from confusion and show me the right path. It felt strange for, at the time, I did not believe God would interfere with such matters. I soon discovered that He actually does!

Shortly after that night I fell ill for ten days. During this illness I had a chance to read through more of the Bible and the Qur'an. As I was reading and comparing, the following verses from the Qur'an came to my attention:

Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light. The prophets who submitted [to Allāh] judged by it for the Jews, as did the rabbis and scholars by that with which they were entrusted of the Scripture of Allāh, and they were witnesses thereto. So do not fear the people but fear Me, and do not exchange My verses for a small price. And whoever does not judge by what Allāh has revealed—then it is those who are the disbelievers.

And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous. And let the People of the Gospel judge by what Allāh has revealed therein. And whoever does not judge by what Allāh has revealed—then it is those who are the defiantly disobedient.

And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it. So judge between them by what Allāh has revealed and do not follow their inclinations away from what has come to you of the truth. To each of you We prescribed a law and a method. Had Allāh willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allāh is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ. (Qur'an, 5:44, 46-48)

The beauty and clarity of this passage, and its emphasis on thinking for myself and judging based on what has been revealed, made perfect sense to me. This passage replaced the distress and confusion with the peace and light of faith. How could this not have been from the Creator Himself? The more I studied the Qur'an, the more I was amazed at its clarity, power, and beauty. In fact, it is common to hear people say that they have always been a Muslim at heart but did not know it until they read the Qur'an. ([Learn about the miracle of the Qur'an.](#))

Needless to say, I had many questions about Islam's position on women, jihad, tolerance of other faiths, human rights, science and religion, and so on. However, the more I studied the more impressed I became with how Islam presents a balanced way of life where everyone's rights are protected. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that Islam is the fastest growing religion in the West. ([Some myths about Islam.](#))

Six months later I learned about a mosque in Davis. I still remember the day I decided to visit it. I drove by and then parked across the street. I hesitated for a while. I wondered, *What if there are some violent fanatics inside? Would I face any hostility?* I eventually left and came back with a friend, just to be on the safe side. Once inside, I was pleasantly surprised to find very nice, humble people, just like those I met in other houses of worship. Actually most of the people I met at the mosque were students like myself. (To find a mosque near you.)

The Muslims I met at the mosque while regularly attending the congregational prayers followed the Sunni sect of Islam. I knew that there were two major sects of Islam with 90 percent of Muslims being Sunni.

Although I was from a Shia background, I felt this was a wonderful opportunity for an objective study of the Sunni and Shia ideologies and a sincere search for the truth in this matter. After all, had not Allah guided me to Islam while I was lost? How could I possibly face Him on the Day of Judgment without having lived the life of a truth seeker?

First, I prayed for guidance in this matter and to make this task easy for me. Then I started looking for a good book that compared the Sunni and the Shia beliefs. Unfortunately, I could not find such a book in English. So I started to talk with both sides on different issues. I soon came to realize that there is a great deal of difference between Sunni and Shia sects, not only in the basic teachings but also concerning historical events. However, it all came down to one issue: the question of *khilafah* or succession to the

Prophet, upon whom be peace. I discovered that this is the root of the problem. Sunnis believe the election by which Abu Bakr, one of the leading companions of the Prophet (upon whom be peace), was chosen to be the leader of the Muslims was valid; Shias do not accept the election results and believe that 'Ali, Prophet's cousin and one of the leading Muslims, should have become the leader. The following pages will deal with this issue in an unbiased way.

Baqir Sadr's Thesis

One day, I came across a Persian translation of a work by a celebrated Iraqi Shia scholar, Imam Muhammad Baqir Sadr: *Tashayou Ya Islam Rasteen (Shi'ism or the True Islam)*. It is a short booklet published by Chopkhane Haydary, Iran, and apparently makes a very convincing case for Shi'ism. To avoid confusion, I decided to study each chapter carefully and to confront a Sunni brother with the evidence that Baqir Sadr presents.

Imam Sadr starts the book by explaining that being a minority, as Shias are, does not mean that Shias are in the wrong. He also points out that there is a good deal of confusion among the masses about the origin of Shia sect. He says that to find the origin of Shia sect, one has to keep in mind the totality of the message of Islam and the fact that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, had brought about a total change in the society. Considering the fact that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, was well aware of the coming of his death, he must have been thinking of the future of Islam, which would have left him with three possibilities:

- To take a negative approach and consider his mission important only during his own lifetime and, therefore, leave the question of succession to the turn of events
- To take a positive approach and leave the matter of leadership to be decided by the council of Makkan immigrants (*muhajireen*) and Madinan supporters (*ansar*)
- To take a wise and logical approach and under divine guidance (literally, the order of Allah) choose a capable person, train him, and breathe into him the true spirit of Islam.

These three possibilities occupy the first three chapters of the book. I studied the first chapter carefully. A brief account of the main arguments therein are:

The Prophet, upon whom be peace, certainly would not have taken a negative approach, leaving the future of Islam to the turn of events, for two reasons:

- Would such negligence on his part have any effect on the future of Islam, or were his Companions quite capable of carrying on the message without altering or deviating from it? Obviously, this is not logical, since Islam had just been established and was facing many threats. Under such circumstances, the loss of its leader would mean a great vacuum in the leadership and would have led to hasty decisions in order to fill that vacuum. Sadr points out the fact that after the

Prophet's death, one of the famous Companions was shouting in the streets and marketplaces that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, was not dead and shall never die. Muslims were still divided among themselves. There were the *muhajireen* and *ansar*, Makkans and Madinans, Quraishites, and others. It was also a good opportunity for the hypocrites and enemies of Islam to mount an attack on the religion. It was obvious that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, was well aware of the then-prevailing conditions. He would not have taken the chance of leaving the Muslim nation without a leader. Judge for yourself, Sadr proclaims:

Abu Bakr felt it his duty to interfere in choosing the next leader of the Muslims. And when 'Umar was stabbed, the people were asking him to nominate a successor. And that was at a time when the Islamic government was strong and centralized.^{[1](#)}

It is also noteworthy that 'Umar considered the selection of Abu Bakr at Banu Saqifah to be a very hasty decision, and that Allah had saved the Muslims from any bad consequences.^{[2](#)} Thus, a man with the insight and wisdom of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, would have at least realized the problems that the Muslims would be facing if he were to leave them without appointing a successor, concludes Sadr.

- Another possible reason for this negative approach would be that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, was only concerned with the mission during his own life, not considering the future of his mission. Certainly such an assumption is quite unthinkable of any concerned leader, not to mention the Prophet, upon whom be peace, who was commissioned by Allah!

These were the main arguments that were put forward in the first chapter. They were quite convincing to me at the time.

Having grasped the argument, I discussed the first chapter of this book with [Jamaal Zarabozo](#), who was at the time also attending the University of California at Davis. He was a Muslim American convert whom Allah had blessed with a great deal of knowledge (he is now a well-known author and scholar). Considering that he himself had to study and choose between Shia and Sunni after he had embraced Islam, he was qualified to help in this matter. The night before the meeting with him, I prayed to Allah to guide me to the truth.

I confronted him with the issue, "How is it possible that Abu Bakr and 'Umar nominated someone as their successors, but the Prophet of Allah neglected such an important matter, a matter upon which rested the future of Islam?"

"But the case of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, is quite different than that of Abu Bakr or 'Umar," he answered. "For the Prophet's word would have been binding on the people, but Abu Bakr's word would not have been so." Upon hearing this, I felt as if suddenly everything became crystal clear. These few words, apparently not very significant, put all of the pieces together. I wanted to argue on this point, but my heart had felt the truth. Nevertheless, I was not willing to believe.

“You are absolutely right, but am I not being convinced too easily?” I asked. His response was that there were people who simply saw the face of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and they became Muslims. Therefore, I should not be surprised at reaching the truth so quickly.

The Invalidity of Baqir Sadr’s Thesis

Now the reader might be wondering how these few words helped me reach the truth. As I mentioned earlier, the root of the difference between the Shia and Sunni goes back to the question of the successor to the Prophet, upon whom be peace. The sects known as Shia consider ‘Ali, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, to be the first *khalifah*. Was ‘Ali divinely appointed to be the *khalifah* or not? Despite all of their differences, Shias and Sunnis agree on one thing: the sincerity and devotion of ‘Ali to Allah and his willingness to sacrifice anything for His cause. One need only recall how this devoted young man accepted Islam at an early age and risked his life by sleeping in the Prophet’s bed the night the latter migrated to Madinah, as the assassins planned to kill the Prophet, upon whom be peace. He was well known for fighting valiantly in the defense of Islam. One may go on and on in describing the virtues of ‘Ali, but this should suffice.

Thus ‘Ali’s obedience to Allah and His Prophet, upon whom be peace, and his willingness to further the cause of Islam is indisputable. If the Prophet had ordered him to jump off a cliff or into a deep well, he would certainly have done so without any hesitation.

Now let us consider what would have happened if ‘Ali was told by the Prophet that he is to be the leader of the Muslim nation and that this is what Allah would be pleased with.

‘Ali’s response under such circumstances would be very clear. He would have done everything in his capacity to become the leader of the Muslims because that was the order of the Prophet.

According to the Shia scholars, after the farewell *hajj* (pilgrimage) at a place called Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet, upon whom be peace, took ‘Ali’s hand and brought him to his right side. Then he said to the assembled gathering, “Am I the authority whom you obey?” They answered in one voice, “We obey your directions.” Then he said, “For whosoever I am the master (*maula*) and the authority, ‘Ali will be his master. O God! Be friendly with the friends of ‘Ali and be an enemy to the enemies of ‘Ali.” Then ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab said to ‘Ali, “May this position be pleasing to you, for now you are my master and the master of all the believers.”³ Thus we see that according to the Shias, not only ‘Ali but a large number of the Companions were well aware of his imminent succession to the Prophet, upon whom be peace.

We may assume, for the sake of argument, that such an event occurred but under different circumstances. Let us imagine that one day during his twenty-three years of prophethood, Muhammad, upon whom be peace, called ‘Ali up to his quarters and

privately told ‘Ali that he would be his successor. Suppose the Prophet even asked ‘Ali to keep this nomination secret until he had died, for reasons known only to Allah.

1 *Tarikh at-Tabari*, vol. 5, p. 24. Quoted by Imam Muhammad Baqir Sadr, *Tashayou ya Islam Rasteen*, (Tehran, Iran: Chopkhane Haydary, 1980), p.15. This book has been translated into English by Ali Akbar Mahipoor.

2 *Tarikh at-Tabari*, vol. 3, p. 20, quoted *Ibid.*, p. 16.

3 Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Tabatabai, *Shi’ite Islam* (New York: State University Press, 1975) p. 180; Sadr, pp. 72–73.

Was 'Ali Violating the Prophet's Command?

In both cases, that is, public or private nomination, we would have found 'Ali to have been aware of this great task. When the Prophet, upon whom be peace, passed away, the question arose whether 'Ali would fulfill this duty of becoming the Prophet's successor or not. He would have known his responsibility to the Muslims. He would have known that he was divinely chosen for this task by Allah and His Prophet. He would have known that he would be asked on the Day of Judgment about his conduct regarding this matter. Did he fulfill his obligation or just sit quietly and leave everything to the turn of events?

Thus, the questions posed by Imam Sadr concerning the Prophet, upon whom be peace, may also hold true for 'Ali himself! The fact that 'Ali was alive and well, and quite capable of interfering in events at the time of the election, puts a great burden on his shoulders.

Without further discussion, it should be very clear that 'Ali would not have kept quiet about this matter. He would have gone to the Muslims, especially Abu Bakr, and said, "O Abu Bakr, on such and such date, the Prophet, in private, chose me as his successor. Allah is my witness and I call for your resignation and demand that you all pledge your allegiance to me."

And, of course, if 'Ali's nomination had been made public, as the Shias claim with their narration of Ghadir Khumm where 'Umar supposedly pledged his allegiance to 'Ali, it would have been easy for him to substantiate his claim of being the rightful successor.

We should, however, keep in mind that we are not talking about political rivals. Rather, we are talking about two noble men who sincerely loved Allah and His Prophet and to gain their pleasure they had sacrificed everything. Therefore, even if 'Ali had no witness except Allah, surely Abu Bakr would not have doubted 'Ali's words about such a grave and important matter.

Now since Abu Bakr continued to be the *khalifah*, and did not give a pledge of allegiance to 'Ali, this would imply, if the stories of his nomination were true, not only disobedience to him but also disobedience to Allah and His Messenger. This also means that if 'Ali had taken the matter to Abu Bakr and he had refused to relinquish the office, the only way for 'Ali would have been to take over the *khalifah* by force. In which case, 'Ali would have no cause to fear because he was a divinely appointed successor and, as such, Allah's help would surely have come to him. Not only would he have ousted Abu Bakr but also strengthened Islam.

Certainly there is no historian, Shia or Sunni, who claims that this ever happened. In fact, 'Ali was one of Abu Bakr's closest advisors. This was owing to the fact that 'Ali was

respected for his knowledge and understanding of legal matters.

The above argument has been brought to the attention of Shia scholars. Their response is that since at the time Islam was weak and Muslims were divided, any such civil strife would have led to great bloodshed and perhaps an end to Islam. Therefore, 'Ali kept quiet. But these scholars forget that it is Allah Who sent us Islam, and it is our duty to obey His commandments. The future is in His hands. The command to 'Ali, according to the Shia, was to become the successor of the Prophet. For 'Ali to speculate over the outcome would have been tantamount to putting his own judgment and wisdom over that of Allah, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. And this, of course, 'Ali would have never done.

Abu Bakr—A Study in Contrast

Right after Abu Bakr's election, very serious problems developed. Muhammad Rashid Feroze writes :

The first setback to Abu Bakr was the great opposition of a large number of the Companions, led by 'Umar to sending the Muslim army under the command of Usama b. Zayd to the territory of Qada'a. They opposed Usama's command of the army because he was not yet eighteen years of age.

They chose 'Umar b. Al-Khattab as their representative. He was asked to suggest to Abu Bakr that either the army should not be sent, or Usama be dismissed. They wanted to appoint a commander with experience of active service on the battlefield. Caliph Abu Bakr thought about the objections of these Companions for a long while that day. He then recalled the time when the Prophet, upon whom be peace, came to the mosque with his head wrapped up and said, "O People, let the army of Usama go."

The Prophet repeated these words three times and continued: "You condemn his command now, you were also critical of his father's command. By Allah, he was qualified for command! By Allah, his son is one of the most capable men after him!" When Abu Bakr recalled this hadith [saying of the Prophet, upon whom be peace], he decided to send the army of Usama, because this was the order of the Prophet of Allah, upon whom be peace, even though it might lead to the loss of his own life. Meanwhile, 'Umar arrived and asked Abu Bakr not to send the army. Abu Bakr replied: "By Him in whose hands is the life of Abu Bakr, if I would have thought that wild beasts would attack me, I would dispatch the army of Usama as ordered by the Prophet, upon whom be peace. Even if nobody remained in the city except myself, I would send this army."

When 'Umar saw that Abu Bakr was determined to dispatch the army, he asked him to dismiss Usama and give the command to one of the well-known heroes of Islam, such as Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas or Khalid b. Walid. But Abu Bakr firmly rejected this proposal. The army led by Usama had a great impact at that time, for most of the tribes had given up Islam after the death of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and they had refused to pay zakah [welfare money for the poor]. They thought that Islam would come to an end after the Prophet's death. The purpose of dispatching the army commanded by Usama was to create fear in the hearts of the tribes who had given up Islam. The tribes said among themselves: "If the Muslims had no power, they would not have sent this army."

This was an example of the wisdom and genius of Abu Bakr at a crucial juncture in the

history of Islam.

Later on, Abu Bakr made further preparations for Jihad against those who had given up Allah's faith and launched a full-fledged war against them. They included almost all the tribes of Arabia, except the Quraysh and Thaqif. Abu Bakr was faced with eleven sources of turmoil and anarchy and wanted to nip the evil in the bud. He assembled the leaders of the Muslim community and appointed them to quell the rebellion against Islam in eleven different areas as follows:

- Khalid b. Walid was sent to Talha al-Asadi, with instructions to go, after dealing with Talha, to Malik b. Nuwaira.
- Ikrama b. Abi Jahl was sent to fight Musailma al-Kazzab, who had claimed to be a prophet after giving up Islam.
- Al-Muhajir b. Abi Umayya was sent to deal with al-Ansi al-Kazzab, and to fight Kinda in Hadramawt.
- Khalid b. Sa'id was sent to Syria to quell the rebellion of the leaders of that area.
- Amr b. al-'As was sent to Qada'a and Wadi'a.
- Hudhayfa b. Hisn was sent to subdue the people of Daba.
- Arfaja b. Harthama was sent to Mahra.
- Shurahbil b. Hasana was sent to help Ikrama b. Abi Jahl, and thence to Qada'a.
- Ma'n b. Hajiz was sent to Bani Sulaym and the people of Hawazin.
- Suwayd b. Muqrin was sent to Tahama in the Yemen.
- Al-Ala b. Hadrami was sent to Bahrai

The names of the leaders of the eleven armies dispatched by Abu Bakr to suppress the rebellion of the tribes gives an idea of the great efforts made by him. It was necessary to prepare these armies for the march throughout the country to announce that Islam was strong and alive. These armies achieved victories after very tough battles in which a large number of the Companions fell as martyrs, including memorizers of the Qur'an. All this sacrifice was made to strengthen Islam and to keep the banner of the faith flying.

Abu Bakr made these great efforts without counting the odds or fearing difficulties involved in running his mission. He wanted to fight the world that had turned its back on Islam and to bring it to the right path.⁴

Thus we see that Islam was in clear jeopardy, yet the Almighty Allah saved the Muslims, because they were obedient to His commands.

The claim that 'Ali did not fight Abu Bakr for the *khalifah* for the sake of Islam is an absurd one. What would have happened if, in the third year of prophethood, when the command of Allah was given to the Prophet, to invite his relatives and kin to Islam, the Prophet, upon whom be peace, had wavered. "Well, we are very few now and we might all be killed if we make our mission public. Therefore, to protect Islam I shall remain quiet!" This kind of approach toward events clearly excludes the hand of Allah in man's affairs and views life as an interaction of material forces, which of course is an idea that no Muslim would subscribe to.

Thus, in short, if ‘Ali was given any hint by the Prophet, upon whom be peace, to be his successor, he would have done everything to assure his succession. We can safely conclude that ‘Ali was by no means commanded by the Prophet to be the *khalifah*, neither privately nor publicly. This leaves the election of Abu Bakr as sound and legitimate.⁵

In my research for this work I came across an amazing statement made by the Shia scholar Tabatabai. This statement is an appropriate end for this section. Tabatabai wrote :

Obviously, according to religious principles, one must force him who has deviated from the truth to follow the truth; one must not abandon the truth for the sake of one who has abandoned it. When the first Caliph [Abu Bakr] was informed that some Muslim tribes had refused to pay religious tax, he ordered war and said, “If they do not give me the tithes which they gave to the Prophet, I shall fight against them.” Evidently by saying this he meant, most of all, that truth and justice must prevail at all costs. Surely the problem of the legitimate caliphate was more important and significant than tithes, and Shi’ism believes that the same principle applied by the first Caliph to this matter should have been applied by the whole early community to the problem of succession to the holy (sic) Prophet.⁶

Needless to say, who would have been more qualified than ‘Ali, as the Shias believe, to carry this responsibility on behalf of the early community?

⁴ Muhammad Rashid Feroze, *Abu Bakr: The First Caliph* (Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, 1976), pp. 31–33.

⁵ The only other possibility would be that ‘Ali knew the truth about his *khilafah* but knowingly disobeyed, which would mean betrayal of Allah and His Messenger. (We seek Allah’s refuge for even mentioning any such possibility.) This would imply that ‘Ali was either a coward or he was insincere. Both possibilities we are forced to reject *a priori*.

⁶ Tabatabai, pp. 183–184.

Venturing Beyond Reality and Reason

As for the remainder of Imam Baqir Sadr's book, he tries to prove that the only solution to the problem of succession to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, was the nomination of 'Ali. He also tries to show how everyone was aware of the issue. He presents more evidence to substantiate his claim.

He quotes from *Ihtejaj*, by the Shia historian Tabarsi, that, "One day Eban b. Taglah asked Imam Jahar as-Sadiq [the sixth Imam of the Shias], 'May my life be sacrificed for you. Did any of the Companions of the Prophet stand against Abu Bakr and blame him for accepting the position of *khalifah*?' He answered, 'Yes, twelve of the Companions condemned his position as *khalifah*. From the *Muhajireen* there was Khalid b. Sa'id b. al-'As, Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Miqdad b. Aswad, Ammar Yasir and Baridah Aslami. And from the *Ansar* there was Abu al-Hatim b. Teyhan, 'Uthman b. Haneef, Hazimah b. Thabit, Dhulshadatayn, ibn Abu Ka'ab and Abu Ayyub al-Ansari.'" [7](#)

Although the preceding quotation mentions condemnation of Abu Bakr's *khilafah*, there is no mention in it of anyone espousing 'Ali's *khilafah*. Even if they did, it is amazing that 'Ali himself kept quiet concerning his "divine right."

Sadr also tries to portray the Companions of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, especially 'Umar, as having political ambitions! The favorite incident quoted by Imam Sadr and other Shia scholars is one that took place a few days before the death of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace. He asked for paper and pen so that he might dictate something, after which they would never go astray. 'Umar said that we have the Book of Allah with us and, furthermore, the Prophet is deeply afflicted with pain. At this point an argument took place over providing the pen and paper that the Prophet had asked for. The Prophet then asked them to leave the room. [8](#)

Imam Sadr argues that the Prophet had felt the danger that would threaten his mission after his death. He wanted to save the Muslims from future problems by leaving a will for 'Ali. This incident is presented as the alleged proof that the Prophet was going to finalize 'Ali's *khilafah*. This is presented in such a manner, in Sadr's book, that it leads the reader to believe that the Prophet, upon whom be peace, died immediately after this event, without having a chance to pronounce 'Ali's succession.

I am forced to make a few comments on this point.

First, it would be very strange to relate this incident to 'Ali's *khilafah* since, according to the Shia sources, his nomination had already been made public at Ghadir Khumm.

Second, if it was such an important announcement, why did not the Prophet, upon whom

be peace, ask again for the paper and pen before his death? We know that Allah had already completed His religion (see the Qur'an, 5:3), so what could have been left out?

Third, this shows that when we look at an incident with biases, it is very easy to interpret it in favor of our particular view.

Fourth, if what the Prophet, upon whom be peace, had to say was to complete and protect Allah's guidance, would it be right to assume that Allah did not make it possible for the Prophet to make the final will in favor of 'Ali? This is to again consider world events as mere interactions of material forces, which excludes the Hand of Allah. If Allah had willed it, the Prophet could have lived not only a few more days but maybe a hundred more years, if that was necessary to complete this guidance from Allah!

Imam Sadr tries, in many ways, to prove the weakness and incapability of the Companions of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, to carry the message of Islam. He says that there were about twelve thousand Companions from whom a great number spent most of their time in the presence of the Prophet, yet there are only a few hundred *ahadith* that have been reported by them.⁷

A casual look at *Sahih Muslim* shows that it contains more than three thousand *ahadith*! And we know that *Sahih Muslim* is only one of the six standard Sunni collections of *ahadith*.

After reading the entire booklet, I became convinced that the claim of the Shia with respect to 'Ali's divine appointment as the successor of the Prophet Muhammad had no basis.

⁷ Sadr, p. 68.

⁸ As quoted by Sadr, p. 19, from *Masnad Ahmad*, vol. 1, p. 300; *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, ch. Wasaya; *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, ch. Solh.

⁹ Sadr, p. 35.

Shi'ism—A Belief Not Grounded in the Qur'an

Allah says in the Glorious Qur'an:

O you who Believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you; and if you have a dispute concerning any matter refer it to Allah and the Messenger if you are (in truth) believers in Allah and the Last Day. That is better and more seemly in the end. (Qur'an, 4:59)

In the preceding verse Allah, the Exalted, said that if you are truly believers in Him and the Last Day refer any matter of dispute to Allah (i.e., the Qur'an) and the Prophet (i.e., the *sunnah*, which are the collections of his sayings, actions, and silent approvals.)

A very important article of faith for the Shias is belief in the imams (i.e., the divinely-chosen successors or leaders from among the descendants of the Prophet, upon whom be peace). They are discussed in the same category as belief in Allah and His prophets.

Imam Khomeini, in his book *al-Hukoomat ul-Islamiyah (The Islamic Government)*, claims that the twelve imams are infallible. He raises them to a level above the heavenly angels and the prophets of Allah. He stresses:

The spiritual status of the imam is the universal divine vicegerency that is sometimes mentioned by the imams (peace be upon them). It is a vicegerency pertaining to the whole of creation, by virtue of which all the atoms in the universe humble themselves before the holder of authority (imams). It is one of the essential beliefs of our Shia school that no one can attain the spiritual status of the imams, not even the cherubim or the prophets.¹⁰

Allah, the All-Wise, says in the Qur'an, "These are revelations of a lucid book." (Qur'an, 28:2.) Any objective reader of the Qur'an, whether Muslim or not, can tell you that the Qur'an is a book that explains matters of faith in very unambiguous and clear terms. It is very clear that a Muslim should believe in "Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the books and the Prophets, and give his wealth for the love of Him." (Qur'an, 2:177.) There are many other verses in the Qur'an that mention the tenets of faith, for example 2:285.

Thus, it is very clear what a Muslim should believe in. Now the question is: If the role of the imam is so important, as the Shia scholars claim, why is it that the Qur'an does not call for belief in the imams?

The word "imam" means "leader or chief" in Arabic, and there are verses in the Qur'an that mention this word. For instance :

And We bestowed upon him [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob as a grandson. Each of them we made righteous. And We made them chiefs [imams] who guide by Our command. (Qur'an, 21:72–73)

And [remember] when his Lord tried Abraham with [His] commands, and he fulfilled them. He said, "Lo! I have appointed you a leader [imam] of mankind." (Qur'an, 2:124)

But unless we first color our thoughts with the beliefs of the Shia and then read the verses, it would be difficult to conclude that the word imam could mean more than the chief or leader. And, of course, there is not a single verse in the entire Qur'an that asks for belief in the imams!^{[11](#)}

There are many different types of Shia, such as the Four Imam Shia (Zaydism), Seven Imam Shia (Isma'ilism), and Twelve Imam Shia (Ja'afary or Ithna 'Ashari). There are also other groups, which are considered heretics and disbelievers by the Shia scholars. Among them are the Batinis, Mustalis, Druze, Muqannaah, and Nusairies. Their deviations range from believing in 'Ali as God to considering adultery lawful.^{[12](#)}

Even among the "nonheretic" Shia, a difference of opinion exists as to the qualities of the imams and the number of divinely appointed imams that one must believe in. Thus the question arises: Why is it that Allah, the All-Knowing, has not only not mentioned the belief in the imams but why is it that He did not make the number of imams to believe in clear for us—four, seven, twelve, or even more?

A few quotes from *al-Kaafi*, which is the source of knowledge for Twelve Imam Shia, will illustrate some of their beliefs. Below are reproduced some of the chapter headings from this renowned work :

The Imams possess all the knowledge granted to angels, prophets and messengers.

The Imams know when they will die, and they do not die except by their own choice.

The Imams have knowledge of whatever occurred in the past and whatever will happen in the future and nothing is concealed from them.

The Imams have knowledge of all the revealed books, regardless of what languages they were revealed in.

There is not a single truth possessed by people save that which originated with the Imams, and everything which did not originate with them is falsehood.

All of the earth belongs to the Imams.^{[13](#)}

And there are many other qualities that the imams possess. Imam Khomeini wrote, "It is one of the essential beliefs of our Shia school that no one can attain the spiritual status of the imam, not even the cherubim or the Prophets."^{[14](#)}

A very important point to keep in mind is that, as stated in the Qur'an, only Allah knows when a person dies. Only Allah knows the future. No human being, unless given such information by Allah Himself, would have such information. As stated in the 112th Chapter of the Qur'an, "And there is none comparable to Him." Thus, no one is comparable to Allah in His unique attributes and anyone who puts forward such claims is setting up as a partner with Allah. And we know that setting up as a partner with Allah is the greatest sin anyone can commit. As Allah warns us in the Qur'an:

Surely Allah will not forgive the association of partners with Him, but He forgives [sins] less than that of whomever He wishes. (Qur'an, 4:48)

This verse refers to the Day of Judgment. On that Day, Allah may forgive someone all of his/her sins, even if he/she never repented. However, if one never repents from associating others with Allah (Shirk) and dies, Allah will not forgive him/her on the Day of Judgment.

As Muslims, we must refer the matter to Allah, and we find no evidence in the Qur'an regarding the qualities of these so-called divinely appointed imams. It is quite evident that Shi'ism is not derived from the Qur'an. I have never met a person who has read the Qur'an for the first time and who has ended up believing in the imams or in even just a few of them. If a recent Muslim convert is reading this, I am sure they know exactly what I mean.

Thus, it is obvious that the Shia Islam has acquired these concepts about the essential tenets of their belief through a source other than Allah.[15](#)

The first part of this work focused on 'Ali, his character, and what his reaction would have been if he had been truly nominated by the Prophet as his successor. However, 'Ali was just one of the close Companions of the Prophet. Can we imagine men such as Abu Bakr and 'Umar, who had sacrificed everything and lived constantly in fear of Allah and in remembrance of the Day of Judgment, suddenly turning into power-hungry politicians who would ignore the Prophet's nomination of 'Ali at Ghadir Khumm?

Now let us consider the following points.

- Whose word could be better than that of Allah? The love and affection among the Companions of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, cannot be matched by any other generation. If 'Ali felt his right was being usurped by the actions of Abu Bakr and 'Umar, as the Shias allege, why did he give his daughter, Umm Kulthum, in marriage to 'Umar in the year 17 A.H., when 'Umar was the *khalifah*?[16](#)
- There are only a few Companions of the Prophet who are considered well-trained in Islam and pious by the Shias. Is this not an indirect way of saying that the Prophet was ineffective in the training of his Companions?

- One of the most respected scholars and great imams was Ja'far as-Sadiq, the sixth Shia imam. He was the teacher of many scholars of his time, including Abu Hanifah, the founder of the Hanifi school of thought that millions of Sunni Muslims adhere to. We do not have any authentic works from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq but having looked at Abu Hanifah's works, who was his student, one wonders how come there is no mention of the imams, the sixth of whom was his teacher? Is this not an indication that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq himself never claimed to be more than a teacher and a servant of Allah, and not a supernatural imam?
- If the belief in the imams is not a manmade idea, would not there be at least consensus among all Shia sects as to their number and their qualities?
- Is it sheer coincidence that not only are there many unfounded, mythical notions in Shia, but also a great many deviated, anti-Islamic sects of Shi'ism such as Nusairis, Druze, and so on?
- I have always wondered how, in God's name, the Shia have gone from belief in 'Ali as *khilafah* to the notion of supernatural imams. Could this have been a plot by the enemies of Islam to cause deviation in and division among the Muslim nation?

Many more questions could be asked, but the above is sufficient to show some of the fallacies in the Shia faith.^{[17](#)}

I would like to conclude this humble work by stressing the fact that there is no deity worthy of worship but Allah, and that there is only one way of life and one straight path acceptable to Him. And that straight path is the way of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* as collected in the authentic *ahadith* of the Prophet, upon whom be peace.

So let us ask ourselves with a sincere heart that on the Day of Judgment, when the entire humanity will be standing and waiting for the judgment, helpless and naked, facing the Creator and the Lord of the Universe, with the Qur'an being the witness, what answer shall we give when Allah, the All-Mighty, asks, "Who gave you permission to believe in the imams while I, your Creator and Sustainer, never mentioned belief in them in any of My revelations?"

For question and comments, please email shiaorsunni [at] yahoo [dot] com

^{[10](#)} Imam Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), p. 64.

^{[11](#)} Tabatabai, p. 186.

^{[12](#)} *Id.*, pp. 75–85

[13](#) Al-Kulaini, *Usul Al-Kafi*, vol. 1, pp. 255–407, quoted in *Alkhutoot al-'Areedha* (Canada, 1983), p. 17.

[14](#) Khomeini, p. 64.

[15](#) The Shia may argue that these imams have been specified by the Prophet, upon whom be peace. The Prophet, upon whom be peace, used to preach the articles of faith over and over again, during the twenty-three years of his prophethood, peace be upon him. Anyone with some knowledge of the collection of hadith knows that the scholars of hadith would have surely reported such a matter, known by so many people. But we do not find any authentic hadith about the Imams in the entire body of hadith literature confirming them. This means that out of thousands of people who met the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and heard the articles of faith by their own ears, not even one reliable report corroborates the shia claim.

[16](#) Dr. Majid 'Ali Khan, *The Pious Caliphs* (Safat, Kuwait: Islamic Publishers, 1978), p. 98.

[17](#) Needless to say, Imam Muhammad Baqir Sadr, Allamah Tabatabai, and Imam Khomeini, who have been quoted here, are among the most respected and reliable Shia scholars.

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